



Religio Journalistici

by

Christopher Morley



Religio Journalistici

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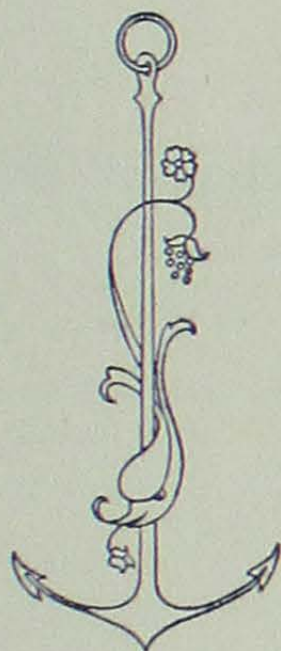
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MINCE PIE
PIPEFULS
PLUM PUDDING
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THE ROCKING HORSE
HIDE AND SEEK
CHIMNEYSMOKE
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE
PARSONS' PLEASURE
THE BOWLING GREEN

Religio Journalistici

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First Edition

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It is not upon you alone the dark patches fall . . .
I too knitted the old knot of contrariety,
Had guile, anger, lust, hot wishes I dared not speak,
Was wayward, vain, greedy, shallow, sly, cowardly,
ardly, malignant . . .
Refusals, hates, postponements, meanness, laziness,
ness, none of these wanting,
Saw many I loved in the street or ferry-boat or
public assembly, yet never told them a word.
—Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry."

.
The secret thoughts of a man run over all things
without shame or blame; which verbal discourse
cannot do farther than the judgment shall approve
of the time, place, and persons.—Hobbes's
"Leviathan."

I WAS coming home from Buffalo in a
train delightfully called "The Black
Diamond." I had any number of books
in my bag, but my lower instincts were

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uppermost: I was tired, and pined for the narcosis of newspapers. I asked the porter, also a black diamond, to see if there were any lying around. He brought me a great mass of them: Chicago papers, Buffalo papers, Wilkes-Barre papers. With great happiness I browsed among their cheerful simplicities. From Wilkes-Barre I learned that

Shakespeare's marvellous plays could never have been written by a dyspeptic. He ate carefully, sensibly, and had excellent digestion.

(I had just come back from the dining car when I read that, and wondered a little sadly if I had been sensible.)

From Chicago ("The World's Greatest Newspaper") I learned, in an article on "A Perfume to Suit Your Personality," that

The vampire had best be sparing in her use of any odour. An oriental bouquet of jasmine,

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tube rose, cassie, and civet would enhance the individuality of the colourful type. For a perfume combination of this sort when used correctly can create a sensation akin to ecstasy, bringing to the wearer a feeling of tremendous vitality.

But in this Chicago paper I found so much to perpend that I never reached the journals of other cities. I learned in an interview with Lady Diana Manners ("Pressed for Precious Secrets of Pulchritude, She Reveals a Surprising Lack of Them") that

The life of a newspaper person is not without its recompenses—aside from the weekly stipend. Sometimes it is a hard life—when, say, you scratch and pound upon the old dome, pleading, begging its tenant, Mr. Brain, to give up an idea, and you get in response a loud and hollow echo convincing you he has left for parts unknown!

I learned from Chicago that

The literary life of New York continues to rattle on. And it is a rather grand life: though a number of writers appear to scratch an existence from the

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soil of Greenwich Village and the purlieus of mean streets, most of the men who write our books live quite comfortably. One meets them every day—a prosperous crew—who lunch cosily at the —— or at the —— and not infrequently the ——, then are whisked homeward in shining limousines to put in another hour or so on the manuscript of a new novel.

A few days later, filled with pensive, affectionate, and somewhat irreverent thoughts about the newspaper business, I went uptown to the offices of a very great New York paper—a paper which, as a gatherer of news, though it does not claim the “Greatest” phrase, comes a lot nearer to it than that one in Chicago. A beautiful bronze elevator lifted me gently to the tenth floor, a beautiful bronze attendant took my name politely and asked me to wait until my host emerged from conference. I gazed amazedly into the editorial penetralia, churchly in as-

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pect, with groined ceiling, panelled alcoves, like pews, and lead-veined glass. Very handsome young women came strolling from those shadowy cloisters of opinion. A scholarly-looking young man, with tortoise spectacles, sat under a reredos of books. If not a curate, at least a curator. It all came down upon me with crushing force. How could one chaff this magnificent thing? How could one speak jocularly of The Press? This was all so terribly real, so unmistakably there. I remembered my amazement when I first entered the Curtis Building in Philadelphia. Beside the humble little state house where a nation was founded rises that gigantic cube of Americanization; in more senses than one it is the exact spiritual centre of America. Does it not contain a mosaic glass picture with "over a million pieces"? It has been

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told, with the jolliest humour, how several of the world's greatest artists were commissioned, one after another, to create a painting of Plato's Grove of Academe for that lobby; but they kept on "passing away" before it was done. There is something most quaintly American, I believe, in adoring Plato with a vast painting rather than by listening to what he had to say. At a window on the seventh floor (I think it was the seventh) might have been seen the strong masculine face of the fashion editor of the *Ladies' Home Journal* gazing out with a sudden unaccountable nostalgia. The trademarked patroness of the "L. H. J.," I remembered, was Pallas Athene. Pallas is right, I said to myself, studying that building. This *must* be a home of literature, the walnut panelling is so fine. This huge bulk, edified from the ribs of a

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simple, shrewd, courageous, and strangely wistful little man from Maine—surely if the Muse were looking for a comfortable lodging, this is where she would habit?

Sometimes it is with an effort that one must remind oneself, a thing is not necessarily wrong because it is so large.

Well, all that came back to me as I sat waiting in the New York newspaper office. Painful doubts, too, as to whether what I am anxious to say is worth attempt. For it is sure to be misconceived. I am not satirizing anything. These matters are far too serious for mere satire, which is so agreeably easy. No, I am merely attempting to think.

I remembered also how, not long before, it strangely befell me to speak in a large church on a Sunday afternoon. I had not rightly apprehended the situation beforehand: I found that I should have to

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mount into what the cheerful minister called "the high pulpit." Sitting behind a thin frondage of palms, and scanning the scene in some frightfulness, I waited my exposure. It was a beautiful church, and there was a large and friendly congregation. In one of the front pews there was even a gentleman with a silk hat. There was music, the thrilling tumult of the organ, a choir, a soprano soloist with a clear and lovely voice. There were prayers, and great words were said. And in the same way that the editorial magnificence of that newspaper office came down upon me from above, so I felt the whole weight and beauty and tradition of Holy Church moulding me and subduing my poor littlepremeditated ardours. I felt the awful hopelessness of attempting to convey, in those circumstances, my feeble and futile sense of the love and

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liberty of life. I knew then why Christ preached in the open air. And I knew that the people in those pews, dear friendly people the latchets of whose minds I was not worthy to unloose, desired me to say what was in my heart just as keenly as I desired to say it. Yet it could not, fully, be done. Holy Church was too strong for them as it was for me. I knew then, even in the small, imperfect way I know things, something of the whole history of religions. I knew how the majesty and glamour and noble gravity of institutions and authorities must have lain heavy on the hearts of schismatics and reformers. It is not that those poor brave souls did not love the rote they questioned. But the rote must be kept in its place. I knew then, for the first time, the real dangers of the pulpit. And yet even that polished wood was

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once alive, growing from earth toward sky.

§2

The world of newspapers and the life of newspaper men are for the most part vulgar, and therefore delightful. I mean vulgar in its exact sense: it is a word neither of praise nor blame, both of which are foreign to philosophy. O thrilling, delicious, childish world! The other day, from a green glade in the country, I telephoned to a newspaper office. "City room, please," I said. The connection was made, and as the receiver was taken down, I could hear that old adorable hum, the quick patter of typewriters, voices on the copy desk tersely discussing the ingenious minutiae of the job. No man who has dabbled, ever so amateurishly, in that spirited child's-play outgrows its irrational and cursèd charm. Over miles

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of telephone wire that drugging hum came back to my ear, that furious and bewildering pulse of excitement which seems so frantically important and really means so little. O world so happy, so amusing, so generously emotional, so exempt from the penalty of thought! World that deals with quaintly codified and abstracted notions of life! How idle to ask whether newspapers tell the truth! With truth they have little concern. Their trade is in facts; like all prosperous tradesmen they are reasonably conscientious. To belittle newspapers for not telling the truth is as silly as to regard them as training-ground for literature. Literature and journalism rarely overlap.

For the newspaper world, that vast, brightly coloured, contentious, and phantasmagoric picture of life that it evolves for its readers, is mostly a spurious world

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evolved for hurried and ignorant people. It is a world so happily out of touch with the world of philosophy that when, on rare occasions, the newspapers get wind of the things that philosophers habitually and calmly discuss, it causes a terrible to-do in the head-lines. The world of newspaper thinking is almost the last resort of the truly childish in heart. With princely accuracy is it called "the newspaper game." Children are not friendly to philosophy, nor hostile. They are simply not aware it exists.

And the game of newspapers, which I greatly love, being at heart no philosopher, is enormously important. The prevailing temperament of its players is worth careful study. The mere existence of newspapers is a proof of the religious instinct among men, that passionate interest in one another which implies that

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we are all gossips together. Gossips are people who have only one relative in common, but that relative the highest possible; namely, God. There is truly some strange analogy between church and press. Whether it is the successful newspaper's taste for making itself clerical in architecture, or the successful church's appetite for front-page controversy; whether it is that they both make the cruellest and deadliest of enemies if annoyed; whether it is that the newspaper carries on the medieval church's lust of persecution; or that they both mobilize for war sooner than any one else; or that both are vehicles of great realities, but vehicles so gorgeously mechanized and ritualized that the passenger has almost been forgotten—whatever the basis of the analogy may be, I am not sure; but I feel it to be there.

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Journalism, like every skilled *métier*, tends to become a sort of priesthood. All such professional groups admit with cynical or humorous readiness, inside the circle, truths that it is unmannerly to gossip abroad. But now and then some happy member feels he has absorbed enough hokum to last him for a reasonable lifetime. He has enjoyed, perhaps even profited by, the sharp childishness of that way of life. He escapes for a time, with aspiration to think it over. He wearies of the tragic ingenuity of men at concealing their real thoughts. There are no longer any codes of manners to be considered, any possibly tender readers to be sheltered, any powerful patrons to be placated. Of course genuinely detached thinking, even if it were possible, is likely to be discouraged; for detachment is always assumed to be malignant. But,

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anyhow, let's be at least like so many houses in the suburbs, semi-detached.

Yes, there is a sort of spring fever of the soul, a seizure when, in moments of golden tranquil intuition, we see Lucretius's "coasts of light." We would hope to savour, as he bids us, not merely the honey that is greased round the rim of the cup—the honey of our daily amusement and distraction—but even the chill purging wormwood of the draft. Suddenly the quotidian employ, the haggling scruples of detail, seem strangely insignificant. Languor and lassitude and uneasy hankering pervade the spirit—an intimation of unearthliness. There is passion to go seeking "those things that are requisite and necessary." In Walt's noble phrase, "to sign for soul and body." Then, unashamed of the hunger and trouble of human spirits, it seems irrele-

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vant either to chaff or to praise the dear farce of life. One dreams of uttering only some small granule of broken truth, something more than the jocund trickery of the press.

Every philosopher is a humorist who has been squeezed. And the newspaper man, odd as this may sound, is not the least appropriate student to pursue the wingy mysteries in divinity. For he is kinspirit of the parson in this, that church and press are perhaps the two professions that have most frankly regarded themselves as separate estates, above and apart from the common man. The priest esteems himself the vicar of God. The pressman appoints himself vicar of News. The priest transmits to the congregation as much of God's doings as he thinks will be not too embarrassing for them to hear. And the newspaper man lays bare that

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portion of the event which he considers the public will be most anxious to pay for. Both are anthologists.

For some time I had been saving clippings of newspaper stories about recent religious controversy. I meant to sit down some evening and read them through, patiently, to see how much humane sense I could winnow. But I found I could not force my eyes through them. For the sake of record, to notify the quaintness of mankind, I copied down a few of the headlines. "CHRIST HELD DIVINE OR ILLEGITIMATE: Dr. Pettingill Makes Baptists Gasp by Strong Defense of Virgin Birth." (New York *World*.) DR. GUTHRIE FINDS YULE ALL PAGAN: St. Mark's Rector Says Gift Custom Was Roman, Mistletoe Celtic and Tree Teutonic. (New York *Times*.) MODERNISM FOUND HERE MID RITUALS, DOGMA MID

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GLARE. (New York *Evening Post*.) DR. GUTHRIE SCENTS CLASHES TO COME. (New York *Times*.) And so on. I threw the mass of clippings into the fire.

And yet throughout those naïve burblings the reader felt a strange mixture of exhilaration and disgust. For the newspapers, with their unerring instinct, realize that men are keenly and desperately interested in these matters. Hidden inside that mysterious carcass, your neighbour, is the universal cry, "I want to be happy!" And with all their agile and cautious skill at hiding what they really think, men wildly crave those liberating sorceries (liquor and love and laughter, perhaps even literature, too) that roll away the stone from the door of the heart.

Yet perhaps no man in his senses talks about religion except for the pleasure of

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the talk, which is a sufficient human excuse. For the less we talk about religion, probably, the nearer we come to the heart of it. By religion we mean, I suppose, our ligatures with an unseen world—a world not realized, as Wordsworth says in those “Intimations” that are a whole prayer-book in themselves. There are “high instincts,” he tells us, before which we tremble “like a guilty thing surprised.” Our guilt, surely, is that we know ourselves to have been so wearily and perversely disloyal to that unseen world of beauty and ecstasy; and our surprise, that when we escape into the honest solitudes of the mind we find it waiting for us. There is a great saying to the effect that wherever two or three are gathered together, I shall be among you. But, alas! it is even more true perhaps (one must not forget a plenty of

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perhaps) that wherever two or three are gathered together, there I am *not*. Human meeting introduces awkwardly human difficulties and embarrassments. It introduces, for instance, vanity and humility, both awkward encumbrances to truth. Is there a man who does not know, sorrowfully, that he is much "better company" when he is alone? As old Doctor Donne found in the absence of his mistress, there is a "close corner of the brain" where the purest and loveliest embraces are possible. Of all mistresses, the fairest and the farthest away is Truth. God is known, if at all, in solitude.

§3

The theological bickerings of our time and their "tincture of choler," as Hobbes would say, are due perhaps to the uneven progress of a great shift in the human

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notion of God. The primitive imagination of Deity is often of a gigantic omnipotent and omnipresent personality. Then, later, men come to think of God as a kind of force or law, or a harmony among infinite laws and forces. This process of magnifying God from a person to a "far-off Divine Event" proceeds unevenly, as do all ideas. And there is no squabbling so violent as that between people who accepted an idea yesterday and those who will accept the same idea to-morrow. More important than the novelty of ideas is the differential in the rate at which people accept them. Or it might even be put the other way round—the rate at which ideas accept people as vehicles. An idea often hops into a person and uses him, more or less as we hop into taxicabs. Bernard Shaw remarked, not unwisely, that his "Irra-

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tional Knot" was a first try (on the part of "the Life Force") to get the theme of "A Doll's House" written in English.

Robinson Crusoe's religion was merely a calculus of personal benefit. When he found that the seeds he threw away had sprouted and come up, he suddenly remembered the goodness of God. But gradually men tend to rise sufficiently above their own pangs and pleasures to relish the conception of a vaster God—a God who does not even know that we exist. There are still, astounding as it seems, actual and living parsons who tell us that the Museum of Natural History is an affront to the Deity. Their simplicity is as delightful as that of Edmund Gosse's father (if you remember that great book, "Father and Son"). The rock that his reason split upon was the

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problem whether Adam and Eve, created *de novo*, had navels. There are others who find in the spider webs and redwood rings of the museum a powerful impulse to wonder and praise. At any rate, this process of magnifying God from an invisible bishop of friable temper to a universal phantom of legality is what Thomas Hardy had in mind when he urged "the abandonment of the masculine pronoun in allusions to the Fundamental Energy." Nor, on consideration, do we find the masculine pronoun a symbol of such benevolent majesty that it need much longer be retained as spokesman for Deity. It is necessary for man to know, as astronomers do, the inconceivable minuteness of himself and his affairs.

Yet, knowing his unimportance, it is equally urgent for man to act as though his business were momentous. For the

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whole intellectual life is based upon paradox and dainty artifice. And here we encounter some fundamental characteristics of human behaviour which are highly interesting.

First of all, man is orderly. Finding himself in a grotesquely complicated universe, he hastily tries to reduce what he sees to some general principles. He concocts helpful formulæ, rules of thumb, mnemonic rhymes, all sorts of proverbs, to simplify matters. There has been a rather absurd eagerness on the part of the newspapers to reproach the church for its adherence to formalism. But man is a formula-bearing animal. And I doubt if the most rigid bishop who ever lived was more at the mercy of ritual and formulated ways of expression than the average city editor. An incident may be as interesting as you please, but unless

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it fits into his carefully ratiocinated scheme of what constitutes a "story" and how it should be "played," it gets little attention. I have mentioned the Museum of Natural History; let's take it again as an illustration. I took there a small girl four years old. At first she was appalled and horrified by the things she saw. Live animals, at the zoo, she was familiar with. But these so genuine-looking and yet motionless creatures, plausible enough in their synthetic facsimile surroundings, yet with a gruesome air of not-quite-rightness—she was badly puzzled. They fitted into no preconceived frame in her small mind.

"Are they real, Daddy?" she inquired.

"They were once real, and now are stuffed," I said.

Her eager mind leaped at this. Here was a happy little formula. And at every

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succeeding specimen, whether a wolf or a puma or a walrus or a whale, with monotonous insistence she asked, "Is it real and stuffed?" To which I replied, each time, with patient repetition, "Yes, real and stuffed." It satisfied her perfectly until we came to the figures of Indians and Eskimos. Here a new formula had to be devised, that they were "Not real, but made to look like it." These trifling statements made the museum, for her, a rational and not too terrifying place.

Once in a while, if you are fond of self-scrutiny, you will catch yourself in the very act of creating or parroting some useful formula. Formulæ swarm in the mind just as birds do in an orchard. And though they destroy some fruit, they also help to exterminate lesser vermin which might do much harm. For the most part

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we are all mercifully unaware of our dependence on them.

Secondly, then, once formulæ are made, another subtle trick of the mind enters into function. Man's sovereign faculty of pretense works upon them. He persuades himself that these little rites and short-cuts are not really made by himself, but that they are sacred. Man's capacity for pretense, I dare say, has been the only thing that has kept him going in a rough, bruising world. He has found, throughout history, that the percolation of certain fictions into affairs made order and government more easy. Indeed the number of generally accepted fictions in currency is not such a bad test of civilization: the more such harmless pretenses, the pleasanter life is. The divine right of kings was one great fiction that had a long serial career and grad-

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ually tapered off. Oliver Cromwell "Garred kings ken they had a lith in their necks"; the Prince of Wales's horses seem to have suggested the same thing. That adorable old shrew, Thomas Hobbes, whose wise and racy survey of human foibles might almost have made any subsequent palaver unnecessary, had people patience to read "Leviathan" nowadays, is copious in instance of men's love of standing "in awe of their own imaginations." We are all quick to believe anything, he remarks, from teachers who can "with gentleness and dexterity take hold of our fear and ignorance." Whereas any truth, no matter how rationally arrived at, that counters our passion and interest, we naturally reject. "I doubt not but," says the darling old cynic, "if it had been a thing contrary to any man's right of dominion that the three angles of a tri-

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angle should be equal to two angles of a square, that doctrine should have been, if not disputed, yet by the burning of all books of geometry, suppressed."

Master Hobbes is very jolly, too, on a matter that has interested every thoughtful observer since civilization began—that religion is always heartily favoured by prosperous people. Obviously; for it is a stabilizing force. I was greatly struck, approaching Pittsburgh on the train, passing through a black, cindered region where life must lack many of its most harmless pleasures, to notice the astounding number of churches. These, surely, are not there without some sound social reason. There are three prime consolations known to man in the difficulty of his life, God, love, and money. Of any two of these you may deprive him without hearing much grumble, provided he has

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plenty of the third. But if he lacks all three, there is sure to be trouble.

I have often noticed, in burning a pile of dead leaves, that the mass that seems burned through will, if turned over with the rake, burst into fresh flame. Down under the mound, smothered by weight and closeness, were many fragments that needed only air and freedom to burst into golden blaze. Perhaps it is so with any industrial society. To turn it top to bottom now and then would liberate brilliant human combustions that now lie choked. It is a dangerous doctrine, but so are all doctrines that are any fun. It is a thoroughly Christian doctrine, too.

Before we leave the topic of human relish in pretense, let's mention one very innocent and amusing example. One of the gay hilarities of existence is the way the current social pretenses shift and vary

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and move in recurring orbits. The *négligé* of one period becomes the *haut ton* of the next. A few years ago, during a very severe winter, it became the mode for young women to go trapesing about in galoshes which were left floppingly unbuckled. What, then, do we see? A year or so later galoshes are put on the market, very cunningly devised with drooping webbed tops to *look* as though they were carelessly left undone. These at once became, particularly in rustic high schools, excellently *de rigueur*. It was a daintily accurate exposition of our human taste for illusion.

And the third fundamental characteristic that I am thinking of is our universal liability to habit. This is too familiar for comment. Take merely one instance which has pleasing analogies. Suppose you go to a small haberdasher to buy a

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pair of socks. In payment, you give him a five-dollar gold piece. As he makes change, he is obscurely troubled. He will ask if you haven't a bill instead. He doesn't relish that coin, because he isn't used to it. Yet, if I understand correctly, gold is the only genuine money there is; all the other stuff is merely money by convention. And how beautifully valid in regard to truth as well. Half-truths to which men are accustomed are so much easier to pass than the golden mintage they rarely encounter! What was it Mr. Don Marquis has remarked: "If you make people think they think, they'll love you. If you really make them think, they'll hate you."

§4

Certainly these three coercive factors, and many others, too, bear strangely upon

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all our attempts to think. The beauty and the happiness of religion, perhaps, lie in the fact that it has little to do with thinking. As far as any man knows, up to now, the universe is insoluble; and the mind, ardent particle, rather resents insolubility. It resents the solemn circling of the Dipper, seen from the front porch every clear night. Filling itself with slow darkness, gently tilting and draining again, it too cruelly reminds us of the orderly immensities of space. And religion may very well be considered a form of art and of anesthetic to soften the onset of that insolvency. It is reason's petition in bankruptcy, "to drown the memory of that insolence." If it makes us happy, we need inquire no further; for happiness is what all pursue. Perhaps, indeed, we are but memoranda in the note-book of the cosmic Author, jottings

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of some story that flashed into His mind one day, but which He did not trouble to write. So we are hunting, hunting endlessly for the rest of the plot. Or we are surf-bathers in an ocean where one step carries us beyond our depth. Accept any figure of speech that appeals to you. No work of art or literature yet, so far as I know, has given an adequate presentment of the glory and agony and mirth and excitement of being alive. Suppose some visitor from another planet dropped in for an evening and could communicate his inquisition. We wanted to give him just one book that would offer a picture, trustworthy, frank, recognizable, of the life we have known—man's long campaign with nature, with other men, with woman, with himself. Some suggest "Candide," but I find that great book too pitiless. Some, Browne's "Re-

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ligio Medici," but is it not too witty? We might, in a hasty ransack of the shelves, linger momentarily upon Boswell or Walt Whitman or Shakespere's Sonnets or "Moby Dick"; or upon the Book of Common Prayer or a photograph of Gozzoli's "Viaggio dei Re Magi." But not even these would duly serve. It would have to be an anthology, I fear; perhaps Robert Bridges's "Spirit of Man," though it should really have a stouter infusion of the seventeenth century, when God-intoxicated and Eros-maddened poets like John Donne and Andrew Marvell uttered their ecstatic and magnanimous despair.

And that brings us to another cusp in this only too risible indent upon the infinite. Religion is an attempt, a noble attempt, to suggest in human terms more-than-human realities. The seat of

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Peter has always lain beyond the Alps. The church, like the poet, is an ambassador from abroad; from the strangest of countries, that lying within our own bosoms. And what is the virtue of an ambassador? Surely, tact. The one thing that makes ambassadors useless or dangerous is too great a zest to blurt out truths that many of us know, but have agreed not to emphasize. He thinks in the language of his homeland; he must speak—though always, we trust, with winningly foreign accent—the tongue to which he is accredited. The ambassador knows, better than any other, that truth is condiment, not diet. It is rough manners to shove truth at people when they are not expecting it. There is always charming significance in popular phrases. "The dreadful truth" is such a one. Truth is always dreaded, not so much be-

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cause it is gruesome or tragic, but because it is so often absurd.

The church, then, comes before us as envoy from the world of spirit to the world of flesh; and here is the anomaly, that only too probably these worlds have small interest in common. So is our envoy but demi-potentiary. In medieval time the problem was simple; flesh and spirit were assumed to be deadly enemies one of the other. But nowadays we lean toward a casuistry far more perplexed; that body is soul's noblest ally, that whatever makes flesh satiate and merry is so much gain for soul. Blithe, ruddy doctrine! Yet, sadly enough, it is even possible that truth is neither Trojan nor avoirdupois. Flesh and spirit sometimes look terribly incommensurable. Saint Paul did not fully plumb the real tragedy of the situation. The most bitter wisdom

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of the human voice is the very opposite of Paul's cry. Transpose it so: *Video deteriora proboque, meliora sequor.*

Body and soul, tied together back to back, see different realms of sky. And the innermost capsule of mind, that very I of very I, though wretchedly at the mercy of pains and lusts, is yet also oddly detached. Sitting in the dentist's chair, the innermost self says: "Here we are. This is terrible. Now he is going to hurt me. Is it the essential me he is going to hurt, or is it just the make-believe me?" But when the pang comes, then truly for an instant all me's whatsoever coalesce into one indignant craven whole. Yet even in that horrid shudder I think we are obscurely aware that it is not our essence that surrenders. That volatile quiddity has retreated in disgust, loath to attend the deplorable scene. He is as

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cheerfully regardless of body as is the tenant of a house he has merely rented, and for rather less than value. He is, perhaps, not unlike the fire on the hearth, the brightness and warm centre of the home, yet caring nought for your cherished odds and ends. What's Hecuba to him? Given a chance, that same domestic ember would devour the whole building; and is no different, in essence, from the roaring streamers that once ran wild in Baltimore and San Francisco.

I knew a lovely and thoughtful woman who, with a few other adepts, used to do graceful figure-skating on the far side of a college skating-pond. There, in a quiet little cove of clear ice, apart from the crowd and the rhythmic, hollow under-song of the whole vibrating lake, this little group swung and twirled. I can see her small slender figure, her bright cheek, the

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lovely float and spread of her skirt as she curved and poised in that steely waltzing. College students and wild hockey berserks and miscellaneous small fry scuttled and careered about; now and then a rubber puck would skim across the ice, and like a pack of hounds the barbarian rout would sweep upon that tranquil shore of the pond. For a moment the pensive skaters would be blotted out by swirling movement—clattering sticks, ringing skates, noisy shouts. Then the rabble would whirl away. The fancy skaters would be seen again; and that lonely figure, swinging, leaning in airy curves, aware of it all with thoughtful eyes a little sparked with annoyance, aloof from the turmoil, yet not unkindly so.

Not otherwise, perhaps, our hidden capsule of identity is a solitary skater. The wild rush of emotions, desires, passions,

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timidities, comes tearing across the pond; lonely Diana is hidden, even shouldered off her lagoon of clear crystal. But then they go racketing away. The pirouette begins again, and the soul is happy with her own concerns.

What language, then, is our ambassador to utter, dealing with two worlds appallingly incongruous? Is it strange if, like the rest of us, he falls back upon prudential and cheery approximations? That witty writer Stella Benson mentions in one of her novels ("The Poor Man") a character who "knew too well the difficulties and dangers of being alive to despise those who sought for safety in tremulous platitudes."

§5

Speaking of ambassadors there was one in the sixteenth century who told the following story:

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At Constantinople I saw an Old Man, who, after he had taken a Cup of Wine in his Hand to Drink, us'd first to make a hideous Noise; I asked his Friends, Why he did so? They answered me, that, by this Outcry, he did, as it were, warn his Soul to retire to some secret Corner of his Body, or else, wholly to Emigrate, and pass out of it, that it might not be guilty of that Sin which he was about to Commit, nor be defiled with the Wine that he was about to guzzle down.

This humorous ancient was not unlike the modern newspaper man. The hideous noise of the press, its conscience-annulling haste, its sense of power and almost uncontradictable certainty,* are

*Mr. C. E. Montague writes as follows of the origin of his novel *A Hind Let Loose*, a witty satire of newspaper life: "It arose from much study—in the course of my daily work—of the editorial articles of the best-reputed English papers. I found that they consisted, to a wonderfully large percentage, of certain stock expressions of positiveness, dislike and contempt. These, I noticed, were so general that they constantly recurred in all sorts of discussions on various subjects, and the fancy took me that their use could be carried further and further until all reference to any particular topic vanished and nothing but quite general positiveness remained, the Olympian mentality and temper just going on asserting themselves for assertion's sake."

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what he employs to warn his soul, his reason, not to look over his shoulder while he is at work. The fact is that the whole ingenious mechanism of a newspaper is so automatically conjoined and revolves so rapidly that by sheer fury and speed of movement it takes on a kind of synthetic life of its own. It could well be imagined thundering round and round of its own accord in a great jovial, shouting stupor. A leading editorial, tearing passions to tatters, could arise by spontaneous combustion, exhaling itself somehow from the general uproar and joy. Virgin birth would be no miracle in a newspaper office: I have seen, and myself committed, editorial matter whose parent had never been approached by any siring intelligence.

Or, in the case of the reporter, painfully trained in a generous human skepticism, enforced student of the way people behave

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and the way things happen, alert to discern the overtones of irony and pathos in the event, you might expect him to be the least credulous of beings. If so, the general flavour of the press little represents him. He acquiesces, consciously or unconsciously, in the fact that in all but a few really intelligent journals the news columns are edited down to the level of the proprietor's intelligence, or what the active managers imagine to be the proprietor's taste. Not in facts, but in the tone adopted in setting out those facts. An Index Expurgatorius is issued for office guidance, lists made of words and phrases not to be mentioned in news stories. The more essentially vulgar a paper is, the more cautious it will be not to use words the managing editor believes dirty. "Obscene," for example, is deleted, and the truly disgusting word "spicy" is substi-

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tuted. And the reporter himself having acquiesced, it is not unnatural that the readers of the paper do also. The great majority of them, tipping their customary sheet day after day with the regularity of dram-fiends, are so indurated to the grotesque psychology of the more popular news columns that to find a paper habitually speaking recognizable moderate sense would afflict them with a warmth of indecency and dismay. The daily journals give them the same pleasure that the serial parts of Dickens's novels gave the early Victorians eighty and ninety years ago. So we have the agreeable paradox that these papers we see all round us, roaring their naïvetés and scandals, are written and compiled by those who are, as individuals, studious, serene, and gently acetic skeptics.

It is an entertaining thought. If it is

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true, I believe it is due to what I think of as the carburetor-adjustment of the human mind, a delicate, unconscious, and continuous process. It pleases me to imagine that in the intellect there is a valve that regulates the mixture of truth and convention that we utter, just as gasoline and heated air are mixed and vaporized in the carburetor of an engine. Whenever we meet any one, or at any rate any stranger, we are likely to be on our guard. We have our own little private reservoir of sincerity, but we don't intend to draw on it too largely until we know we are safe. There are some people, as you must have noticed, to whom it is almost impossible to say a word of what you really believe. Accordingly, automatically and almost unconsciously, we make a mental adjustment of our "mixture." We admit into it just as much

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truth as we believe the other is likely to relish, or willing to receive. But we may have made a bad guess. The conversation begins to back-fire. That means the mixture is too "lean." Very well; pull out the choke, enrich it with more candour, all goes delightfully. Too "rich" a mixture, however, is, every mechanic knows, as bad as too "lean." The mind gets crusted with carbon—unassimilated truth. The analogy seems to me highly applicable, even down to the infusion of what used to be called, in a bygone slang, "hot air." Through this needle-valve, for the most part unconsciously, we regulate our mental ignition.

All this, as you shall see presently, has its just bearing on our topic of religion. We need, but are little likely to get, a new "Areopagitica" to liberate our press from its cheery bondage of vulgarity and slip-

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slop thinking. The newspaper man who has pride in his honourable tradition may well feel grim to see the things he has sweat for trafficked across counters like bundles of merchandise; yes, and to see the transaction applauded by eminent statesmen and divines who feel the need of a front-page quote. A little pride is desirable now and then; yes, in God's name, a little pride, gentlemen. We who have lived, as best we could, for the decency of letters; who have vigiled with Chaucer and taken wine with Descartes and changed opinion with Doctor Johnson, are we to be hired to and fro by the genial hucksters who know the art of print chiefly as a rapid factory for gaily tinted palaver?

In his tight place, beset by doubts just as acute as those of the young theologian, our newspaper man ratiocinates upon the

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quaint processes of mind. He broods on the haphazard, interest-tainted, and fallible nature of most mortal opinion. He studies the relativity of truth and the proliferation of rumour. He notes how every event is like a stone cast into a pond; it ejaculates concentric vibrations, widening loops of hearsay. Varying layers or rings of truth are available for different classes of bystanders, or by-thinkers. How well he knows the queer fact that you can say, unrebuked, in a weekly what would never pass in a daily! You can say still more in a monthly; in a quarterly review almost all the beans can be decanted. And in a book, quite often you can print your surmises in full. Of course, to tell exactly what happens, as Pepys did, it is best to be dead. (How odd is the saying, "Dead men tell no tales." Why, they tell the best tales of

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all.) It does sometimes seem as though the more immediate readers there are for any bit of print, the less candour can be rationed out for each.*

So every human being stands at the centre of a little eddy or whirl of testimony. If one could make a map or editor's projection of him considered as a news item—it would be as complicated as an ocean chart with festoons of barographs and isotherms, curves and twists and arrows indicating set of currents, prevailing winds, soundings. On such a chart, we would denote here a cyclone of scandal, there a hot monsoon of misappreciation, yonder a steady trade-wind

*There is a very able book called *The Gospel According to Judas*, written by a professor at a Western college, which has circulated in MS. among publishers for ten years, without yet finding one who is willing to take a chance on its very remarkable wit and uniquely original conception of the New Testament story. I have often wondered whether it will ever get printed.

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of generous sympathy. In an ocean so various we should find our victim leading a thousand different phantom lives in the opinion of others. If you begin to think about this sort of thing, the asylum waits; for truly, confronted by the alternating delights and possibilities of life, the mind is not unlike that chameleon that went mad when tethered on a Paisley shawl.

The newspaper man, then, begins to feel perhaps that it is necessary for him to undertake the burden of fidelity to human realities—that burden that is often so lightly shrugged off by bishops. Looking at things in the large, or trying to, he strongly suspects that formal religion, as we have known it, is dying; lovelier and greater poetries are pushing in. (There are thousands of years still to come, you know.) The highest honour that

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he can pay to sacred matters is to regard them as so thrillingly actual that they can be accepted into the great general body of human life. To regard them, indeed, as news, as the word Gospel itself suggests. It would seem fairly obvious that the miracles and parables of the New Testament, like the various creeds themselves, were intended as vivid and stunning apologues. To batter them down to the level of facts seems to degrade them, as it would be degrading to reject Keats's sonnet because there are no peaks in the isthmus of Darien, and because it wasn't Cortes. The newspaper man prefers to take his stand with Tolstoy, who said, in that thrilling book "A Confession": "I wish to understand in such a way that everything that is inexplicable shall present itself to me as *necessarily* inexplicable." He prefers that

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when there is an available and mortally recognizable way of understanding things, they should so be understood. Take, for example, the story of the miracle at Cana. To a man trained to observe the delightful ways in which testimony arises and is transmitted, how does that story explain itself? Here is a wedding party, at which appears the amazing stranger. He seems a man more fascinating, more charming, more utterly delightful, than any that those country folk have ever encountered. They are all very merry, the toasts go round, the wine runs short. But the ruler of the feast, turning to the stranger, says, prettily enough, I think, "With *you* here, water is as good as wine." Some one else takes it up, echoing the sentiment, seeking to add to it. "Right!" he cries. "Our friend here makes the water into wine. Here's to

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you!" And with friendly applause the gathering ratifies the compliment. One of the servants overhears, and carries the incident into the kitchen. How quickly it grows and passes down the village street! "They've got some one in there who's turning water into wine!" Can it be denied that this is the way that human events are reported?

Let us take an example of a miracle-germ in our own time. When Horace Traubel, faithful and simple-minded disciple of Walt Whitman, died in September, 1919, his body was taken to the Community Church, at Park Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street, New York, for the funeral service. But when the body reached the church, the little company of mourners could not enter; the building had suddenly caught fire. Imagine this episode handed down through generations

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of simple people by word of mouth. The intimate disciple of a great poet, both of them impatient of the genteel religions, is borne dead to a sacred edifice. It bursts into flame. Would that not be taken as some authentic Pentecost, and at the very least as a proof of Walt's divinity? Yet we know well enough that the event was no miracle, but rather what Hobbes called "an extraordinary felicity."

There is one more Biblical passage I should like to refer to, one that has often been considered a knotty saying. It is the parable of the talents and the unprofitable servant. I like to conceive Deity in the guise of that hard master who wanted his own with usury. "Well," I can imagine God saying to the newly dead, "what did you think of that world I gave you?" "Not so bad, on the

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whole," replies the embarrassed soul. "What!" cries God. "Simpleton, do you mean to say you took it as you found it, accepted it, swallowed it down without question? Depart from me, unprofitable servant! You were supposed to remould it nearer to your heart's desire, to create out of my materials a new world of your own."

Old Doctor Jewett said to Margot Asquith, "You must believe in God in spite of what the clergy say." And truly I don't think that any man who has worked in downtown New York can be much of an atheist. In that great jungle of violent life, under the glittering spires of such steep cathedrals, he must inevitably be a trifle mad. Even Manhattan, supposed to be most material of cities, is best known for the fantastic figure she cuts against the sky. The loveliest picture I

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ever saw of her profile was a photograph given me by an amateur lensman who caught it by accident. It shows that uneven scarp of buildings in soft masses of dark and shadow, looming on a queerly pebbled and fuscous twilight, like an eclipse. And this, as my astonished friend learned from his film-dealer, was an accident, due to mildew on the gelatin. So some of the most lovely visions of reality are printed on minds that are mildewed. The madman and the nincompoop often see more beauty than the sane and solid cit. The only possible suggestion that one might humbly venture to offer to the authoritative officers of Holy Church is that they are too sane and too businesslike. They ask us to believe not things that are too hard, but too easy. They are too eager to lock the stable door after the Messiah has been

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stolen. They have learned the tricks of our world of flesh so glibly that they seem sometimes to forget the manners of that world of spirit they are commissioned to represent.

For the world is fascinating and painful beyond human power of testimony. The best of every life is unprintable. If one were given five minutes' warning before sudden death, five minutes to say what it had all meant to us, every telephone-booth would be occupied by people trying to call up other people to stammer that they loved them. You would want to tell a whole lot of people that you love them, but had been too clumsy and too shy to admit it. And the newspaper man himself, who both loves and hates his queer trade, would be the first to remember that one always is severest with what one adores. Every movement is set in

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some strange turning of wonder. As a man will suddenly discover in himself some miserable petty trick of behaviour which, he painfully realizes, is a true microcosm and characteristic of his life as a whole, so now and then with the world at large. We are aware of lights and shadows and moments of millennium that seem a part of some vast consistency. You know the thrill of a letter or parcel that comes from some one you are fond of, far away. As you undo the string, you say, foolishly, but with a genuine quaver of sentiment, "When that was tied up, So-and-so handled it!" Well, there are instants of preposterous happiness, clear insight, that are just like that—little packages of reality, tied up in the twine of our time sense, that come to us direct, intact, from the eternity and infinity we call God. It matters little how

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you explain that great word to yourself. Perhaps you mean by it the sum total of all human awareneses of beauty. In that sense of prevailing loveliness we are all obscurely united. In those moments, moments of heavenly farce and unredeemable tragedy, we can forgive ourselves for being only human.

But in these matters silence is the final eloquence. One does not argue with moonlight. Men talk of "finding God," but no wonder it is difficult; He is hidden in that darkest of hiding-places, your own heart. You yourself are a part of Him. The chief danger is to be too prosaic. Any one who has ever done proof-reading knows the delicious fidelity and strict zeal and maddening literalness with which the professional corrector marks a galley-proof. How he construes the text according to his own rote and rigid scheme; how

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he resents any unusual use of words; how he is so busy querying things that look odd to him that he misses many of the downright errors. That is precisely the attitude of man toward the universe, which he is so daringly anxious to interpret in some comforting sense. The journalist, whatever his sins and stupidities, would hope to enjoy the text of life in the spirit of a collaborating author rather than presume to correct it. And he will not do any great poet, such as Christ, the dishonour of taking him too literally.

We cannot hope until we have learned to despair. Let me remind you of some great lines by Andrew Marvell:

My love is of a birth as rare
As 'tis for object strange and high:
It was begotten by Despair
Upon Impossibility.

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As lines, so loves oblique, may well
Themselves in every angle greet:
But ours, so truly parallel,
Though infinite, can never meet.

THE END

